

Message Text

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GENEVA FOR AMB SHERER

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT CZ

SUBJECT: INAUGURATION OF PRESIDENT HUSAK

1. AT CEREMONIES IN PRAGUE CASTLE ON MAY 29. GUSTAV HUSAK WAS ELECTED AND INAUGURATED AS THE SEVENTH PRESIDENT OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA. THE CEREMONIES WERE PROPERLY POMPOUS AND HAD MORE OF NATIONAL TRADITION ABOUT THEM THAN OF COMMUNISM. THE LATTER WAS REPRESENTED, OF COURSE, BY THE UNANIMITY OF THE VOTE FOR HUSAK.

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2. THE PROCEDURE WAS SIMPLE. CHAIRMAN OF THE FEDERAL ASSEMBLY

INDRA EXPLAINED HOW THE STATE OF PRESIDENT SVOBODA'S HEALTH HAD NECESSITATED THE ELECTION, THEN PRIME MINISTER STROUGAL PROPOSED THE CANDIDACY OF GUSTAV HUSAK, SPEAKING AT SOME LENGTH ON THE SERVICE OF SVOBODA AND THE MERITS OF HUSAK. THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION WAS THEN ANNOUNCED, BALLOTS WERE DISTRIBUTED, AND MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY MARCHED PAST THE BOX AND CAST THEIR SECRET BALLOTS. AFTER A SHORT RECESS, INDRA DELIVERED THE REPORT OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION WHICH STATED THE NUMBER OF DELEGATES VOTING AND THEN THE NUMBER OF VOTES FOR THE OFFICIAL CANDIDATE, WHICH WERE IN FACT THE SAME NUMBER. INDRA, STROUGAL AND A PROTOCOLARY OFFICIAL THEN WENT OUT TO GET HUSAK, WHO MARCHED BACK WITH THEM SOME TIME LATER TO LONG APPLAUSE. HE TOOK OATH OF OFFICE (IN SLOVAK,) THE LOVELY NATIONAL ANTHEM WAS PLAYED, AND THE ASSEMBLY RETIRED TO THE COURTYARD OF PRAGUE CASTLE, ADJACENT TO ST. VITUS CATHEDRAL, WHERE HUSAK RECEIVED THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE OF THE MILITARY REPRESENTED BY THE SHARP CASTLE GARRISON TROOPS. HE THEN RETIRED TO THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE, WHERE HE MET IN TURN WITH ALL THE MAJOR NATIONAL GROUPS, AND ULTIMATELY WITH THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS.

3. THE DEAN OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, DUTCH AMBASSADOR FROGER, MADE THE TRADITIONAL SPEECH OF CONGRATULATIONS (SPEAKING ENGLISH, WHICH WAS TRANSLATED IN HUSAK'S EAR BY AN INTERPRETER) TO THE NEW PRESIDENT OF BEHALF OF THE CORPS. HUSAK'S REPLY (TRANSLATED CONSECUTIVELY INTO RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH) WAS COINED IN TRADITIONAL DIPLOMATIC LANGUAGE, WITHOUT ANY PRONOUNCED SOCIALIST NOTE. HE EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR FROGER'S WORDS ABOUT PRESIDENT SVOBODA, PLEDGED TO CONTINUE SVOBODA'S POLICIES, AND SPOKE ABOUT CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S DESIRING A PEACEFUL EUROPE AND GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD. HE ALSO ASKED THAT THE CHIEFS OF MISSION TRANSMIT HIS PERSONAL GREETING AND BEST WISHES TO THE HEADS OF STATE OF THEIR GOVERNMENTS. HUSAK COMPORTED HIMSELF WITH STATESMANLIKE DIGNITY, AND IN FACT HAD THE PUBLIC BEARING OF A PRESIDENT, WHICH HE COMBINES WITH A CERTAIN WARMTH THAT COMES ACROSS CLEARLY IN FACE-TO-FACE ENCOUNTERS.

4. FOLLOWING HIS SPEECH TO THE CHIEFS OF MISSION, HUSAK WALKED DOWN THE LINE, ACCOMPANIED BY FOREIGN MINISTER CHNOUPEK (ALSO A SLOVAK), AND GREETED EACH ONE. (THE CHARGE EXPRESSED CONGRATULATIONS TO HUSAK IN CZECH, BUT REFLECTED TO HIMSELF THAT HERE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HE WAS SPEAKING CZECH TO TWO SLOVAKS, HAVING SPENT THOSE DIFFICULT MONTHS ON THE WRONG LANGUAGE.)

5. SEVERAL THINGS WERE NOTEWORTHY IN THIS CEREMONY. FIRST, THE NATIONAL TRADITION WAS STRONGLY EMPHASIZED. IN NEARLY ALL PUBLIC EVENTS IN THIS COUNTRY, A RED FLAG OR MORE OFTEN A SOVIET FLAG IS HUNG WITH THE NATIONAL RED-WHITE-AND-BLUE; BUT IN THE SPLENDID VLADISLAV HALL, ONLY A GREAT NATIONAL FLAG WAS DISPLAYED. SECOND

THE CONTRAST AND INDEED THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF THE NATIONAL AND THE COMMUNIST TRADITIONS WERE NOTICEABLE. THIS SYSTEM MOST EMPHATICALLY BEARS THE MARKS OF THE FIRST PRESIDENT, TOMAS MASARYK--INDEED, IT IS THE ONLY COMMUNIST COUNTRY TO HAVE SUCH A TRADITION. AND YET THE NAMES OF MASARYK AND BENES WERE UN-PRONOUNCED. WHAT IS MORE, THE NAME OF THE FIFTH PRESIDENT, NOVOTNY, WAS NOT MENTIONED. SO THAT IN REFERRING TO THE PRESIDENTIAL TRADITION, BOTH INDRA AND STROUGAL REFERRED TO ONLY THREE MEN, GOOTWALD, ZAPOTOCKY, AND SVOBODA, LEAVING THREE PRESIDENTS AS NON-PERSONS. THIS DISMEMBERMENT OF CZECHOSLOVAK HISTORY WAS STRIKING, AND YET THE REFERENCES WERE MADE TO THE NATIONAL TRADITION, AND ONE FELT THAT SOMEHOW IT WAS STILL ALIVE, DESPITE THE UNANIMOUS VOTE. WATCHING THE DEPUTIES CAST THEIR LITTLE PUSILLANIMOUS BALLOTS, ONE REMEMBERED THAT IN 1968 THEIR COUNTRYMEN STIRRED INTO POLITICAL VITALITY WITHIN A MATTER OF MONTHS, AND COULD DO SO AGAIN IF EVER GIVEN THE CHANCE. SO THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE EMPTY SHELL OF A TRADITION, AND THE KNOWLEDGE THAT IF ALLOWED TO BE THEMSELVES, THE CZECHOSLOVAKS WOULD LIVE UP TO THE TRADITION AGAIN OVERNIGHT, WAS QUITE PALPABLE IN VLADISLAV HALL.

6. ANOTHER FEELING THAT SEEMED TO BE HANGING IN THE AIR WAS THAT OF SENSITIVITY IN CZECH-SLOVAK RELATIONS. THE EXISTENCE OF THE FEDERAL STATE IS REFLECTING IN ALL THE PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES, SO THAT ONE WAS KEPT AWARE THAT THIS WAS A BI-NATIONAL STATE. PERHAPS TO GO BEYOND THAT STATEMENT IS TO GO INTO THE REALM OF FEELING RATHER THAN POLITICAL FACT, BUT ONE WAS AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF HEARING THE PRESIDENTIAL OATH FOR THE FIRST TIME IN SLOVAK, AND ONE WONDERED IF WITHIN THE CZECH LANDS THIS SYMBOLISM WOULD NOT BE A MATTER OF SOME IMPORTANCE. AGAIN, THE CONFLICT OF TRADITIONS, SLOVAK DOMINANCE REPLACING THE ACCUSTOMED CZECH ASCENDANCY WHICH WAS INHERENT IN THE MASARYK-BENES REPUBLIC, WAS TANGIBLE; ONE FELT THAT CHANGE WAS INDEED TAKING PLACE, EVEN IF THE PRESIDENCY IS NO LONGER WHAT IT WAS.

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7. FINALLY, THERE WAS MEAT FOR REFLECTION IN THE FACT THAT HUSAK, WHO HAD CONDEMNED NOVOTNY FOR HOLDING BOTH THE STATE AND PARTY TOP POSTS AT ONCE, WAS NOW FOLLOWING IN NOVOTNY'S FOOTSTEPS (EVEN IF NOVOTNY'S NAME COULD NOT BE PRONOUNCED ALOUD). ALTHOUGH THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE HAD ISSUED A STATEMENT THAT WHAT WAS ONCE WRONG WAS NOT RIGHT, ONE WONDERED IF SOME OF THOSE PRESENT DID NOT PERCEIVE THE CONTRAST. THE EMBASSY WILL BE SUBMITTING ITS ASSESSMENT OF WHAT HUSAK'S ASSUMPTION OF THE PRESIDENCY MEANS IN CZECHOSLOVAK POLITICS, AND THIS NEED NOT BE TAKEN UP HERE. BUT DURING THE CEREMONY, THIS CENTRAL FACT OF THE CONCENTRATION OF POWER IN ONE MAN'S NAME WAS SURELY ON MANY PEOPLE'S MINDS.

8. IN SHORT, THE CEREMONY, EMPTY AND LIFELESS IN MOST WAYS, WAS ALSO FULL OF GHOSTS--AND, IF ONE IS

AN OPTIMIST, OF POSSIBLE PORTENTS FOR MEANINGFUL
INAUGURATIONS AGAIN IN SOME DISTANT FUTURE.

9. THE MOST QUOTABLE REMARK OF THE DAY FOR THE CHARGE CAME
AT THE END OF THE CEREMONY WHEN HE CLIMBED BACK INTO THE
AMBASSADOR'S CAR AND OBSERVED TO THE CZECH DRIVER THAT HE HAD
JUST SEEN HIS NEW PRESIDENT INSTALLED. THE DRIVER THOUGHT A
MOMENT, GRIMACED, AND SAID, " NOW WE HAVE ONLY SLOVAKS OVER US."
PERRY

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